

# THE QUIVER

Saturday, November 28, 1868.



"Her long, free, happy girlhood was over."—p. 115.

## ESTHER WEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEGGY OGLIVIE'S INHERITANCE."

### CHAPTER XVI.—CONNIE'S FRIEND.

THE Vaughans and their party, consisting of Herbert Palmer, who was now considered one of the family, and Mr. Carrington, had waited in vain for the appearance of Esther. They had not

cared to begin the game, but were still sitting in groups on the lawn, on any spot of shade which was to be found, while the afternoon wore on. Milly and her lover were together, just out of earshot of the

rest, engaged in one of those interminable conversations, which outsiders think it would be so interesting to hear, but which they would certainly vote a dreadful bore, if written down here word for word.

The shadows were lengthening; the servants had brought out tea to the idlers, and laid it under the shade of the great elm—which, though planted in the border beyond, threw its boughs over one corner of the lawn—when Harry was despatched. Connie threw down her cup in order to hasten towards him, and its fragrant contents were wasted on the thankless soil, to her elder sister's manifest discomfiture. Ever since the engagement of her sister, Kate had been restless and irritable.

As Constance came back by Harry's side, she called out suddenly—

"Oh, Katie, Esther is gone."

At that moment Mr. Carrington, charged with a cup of tea for each of the lovers, had turned his back on the approaching pair, but at these words he wheeled round, and in doing so dropped the contents of one hand on the grass. It was evidently an unlucky tea-drinking. With a clatter of broken china, a laugh from the lovers, and a "never mind, Mr. Carrington," from Kate, the whole party drew together to hear what Harry had to tell.

He told the story, as far as he knew it, with the unreserve which characterised him, having learnt from Constance that they already knew all that had preceded. He spoke of Martin Potter's threats and of Esther's departure without any profound emotion, and concluded by saying that they would soon have her back. All the time he was speaking, Carrington was looking at him with an expression of profound contempt, which he did not take the least pains to disguise.

"To get her back may not be so easy as you suppose," he said. "Her father had power to claim her, and he has power to detain her."

"Yes," said Mr. Vaughan. "Esther cannot be more than twenty at the utmost, and it is in her father's power to keep her till she is twenty-one; but he is powerless, I should think, under the circumstances, to injure Mrs. West."

"Oh, perfectly," said Mr. Carrington. "No information would lie against her; she is quite safe."

"But, papa, you can surely do something for Esther," said Constance, with a faith in him which nothing ever shook.

"Nobody can do anything if her father should prove obstinate," said Mr. Vaughan; "but I should hardly think he would. It is obviously for the advantage of his child that she should return to Mrs. West; and, on the other hand, there is no advantage which he can reap by detaining her."

"Then why should he have taken her away at all?" said Mr. Carrington.

"I dare say it was to gratify his sense of power,"

said Mr. Palmer, who was adroit at mental analysis. "Besides, it is a question of rich against poor," he continued. Mrs. West is rich; Martin Potter is poor; he cannot allow her to triumph over him in any matter of right. Depend upon it, there is something of this natural antagonism at the bottom of it."

Then they diverged into the general topics most interesting to all of them—those connected with the welfare of the people; topics in which Kate and her sisters had been accustomed to find interest too. But this afternoon, the general welfare was lost sight of, in concern for their friend. Constance begged to be excused, that she might go to Mrs. West at once, and Kate and Milly retired into the house. Before doing so, however, the former turned to Mr. West, and asked if he would stay to dinner. He accepted, unhesitatingly, and Constance carried with her a message to Mrs. West to that effect.

Constance returned from "The Cedars" only just in time to run up-stairs and wash her hands before dinner. The bell had already rung, and all the others were in the drawing-room. She came in, therefore, in her morning dress; while the other two were looking their fairest in pretty evening dresses of white muslin adorned with their favourite blue. The consequence was, that from the contrast, Connie in grey quite justified Mr. West's description of her as the "plain one." Moreover, she had been crying; a fact which her sisters could discern, though it probably escaped the notice of any of the gentlemen. Mr. Carrington took her in to dinner, Mr. West having already appropriated Kate.

The gentlemen did not remain more than a quarter of an hour behind the ladies, and no sooner had they joined them than Kate proposed a game. There was plenty of light still, and the lawn looked more tempting than ever. She was warmly seconded by Mr. West, at whom Constance was looking daggers; Milly and Mrs. Palmer offered no opposition, they were perfectly indifferent, every phase of existence being equally satisfactory to them just then.

The young people left Mr. Vaughan to his review, and went off to their game.

"I shall take Mr. West in hand," said Kate; "and, Connie, you can take Mr. Carrington." Milly and Mr. Palmer being quite content to stand aside.

It was a curious thing to watch Mr. Carrington play. He was as serious and deliberative as if some fate hung on the issue of the game; moreover, he was, at first, singularly unfortunate, while Mr. West's reckless performances were carrying him and his partner to the goal. Kate was guiding him through a series of successes, and both were laughing gaily, when Constance, who stood a little apart, with Mr. Carrington by her side, looked from them to her companion. The look was one of mutual intelligence, at least Constance Vaughan read it thus.

"I wonder," she said, "if I were to disappear

from the spot I am standing on how many people in the world would miss me after half an hour."

"I for one," said Mr. Carrington, shortly, and Constance blushed, and for the first time in her life felt strangely conscious.

They could only talk in disjointed sentences, because of the exigences of their game. Constance was called away at this point, and Kate's next stroke turning out a failure, Mr. Carrington was called on, immediately, and found a savage satisfaction in sending Mr. West's ball to the furthest corner of the lawn, where it bounded off and into the shrubbery. It was getting dusk, so that the ball could not be found, and Constance rather impatiently desired to quit the game. Kate gave it up at once, quite good humouredly, but no one seemed inclined to go in-doors, and Milly proposed a stroll to a little wood which skirted the hill, that they might listen to the nightingales. They went in-doors to get some light wraps and to change their shoes, for the dews were already falling.

The evening was one of those which intoxicate the senses with loveliness. The full moon had risen and was filling the garden with mystic light; the acacias at the gate looked like trees of fairy-frosted silver, the cups of the tall lilies like so many alabaster lamps; only the white flowers showed their hue, but the scents of all were mingled together in one divine essence.

But the meadow was the loveliest of all; through the tall uncut grass the ox-eye daisies shone with a wonderful weird beauty, such as they never wear by day. A new wonder thrilled them in the wood. The moonbeams raining through and between the leaves, making them shine like emeralds. Before they reached the wood they had agreed to go forward in perfect silence, and Kate had had to enforce the rule on her companion more than once. But it would not do. Harry would whisper his admiration and his impatience; for the birds—they were few and shy—would not sing. At length, from the distant part of the wood, the first notes came with their peculiar thrilling tenderness. They were answered by nearer ones, and all listened breathlessly while answer and reply, complaining, pleading, caressing, again, and again, and again repeated, made the little thicket ring.

A pause came. Harry would follow in the direction from which the last thick-coming, thrilling notes had sounded, and Kate went with him. Constance was about to follow, also, but Mr. Carrington laid his hand on her arm, and arrested her. They stood together in the charmed silence, while the sounds of the others' footsteps died away, and in that silence each listened to the voice of his and her own heart. At last Mr. Carrington whispered his companion's name, and the tone was unlike any tone of his that she had ever heard before, familiar friends as they were. It did not startle her. It was in utter

harmony with the enchantment of the hour, with the raining moonbeams and the throbbing melody which yet lingered in their ears.

She did not answer; she did not voluntarily move even; but their shadows on the sward wavered and mingled more closely. He took her passive hand and laid it on his arm. "Constance," he repeated, in the same earnest whisper, "you have been like a sister to me. You are the only woman whom I really know, except my mother, and I think you understand me better than she does. I shall be miserable if Esther West marries this fellow."

There was momentary silence before his companion replied. Then her hand tightened on his arm, and she said, quietly, "You love Esther?"

"Yes," he whispered; "I never knew how much till now. I thought my heart was set on a career; but now I feel as if life would be worthless without her."

Another pause, and the silence was dissolved by the wonderful thick-coming melody. If Mr. Carrington had been looking at his companion's face, whitened by the moonlight, its expression might have struck him as something new to the cheerful, friendly girl. It was exalted and refined by passion—a passion of tenderness and devotion—and sweet with the intense sweetness which is wrong from pain.

It was love for another that had sounded in every tone of her companion's voice, and thrilled through every touch, awakening in her a response to which there could be no utterance now, nor for ever, though her heart should ache with it to death. Out of his love he had hurt her thus, though unknowing of the hurt; and out of hers she stood there prepared to strengthen and comfort him.

"I do not think that she can care for Mr. West," she said. "Mrs. West and he seem to have made it up between them, without reference to Esther. In your place I would not give in." She spoke with her old playfulness, and looked up smiling.

"But how am I even to see her now? You see I have lost all my opportunities."

"Wait, and I may be able to help you," she answered.

"I knew you would," he replied; and gave the hand that lay on his arm a friendly pat, which sent a shiver through the girl's heart.

A new light had fallen for Constance on the weird, white flowers, so disregarded by the light of common day. As she walked through that enchanted meadow, with her hand still resting on Mr. Carrington's arm, she felt that she was no longer a careless girl. Her long, free, happy girlhood was over; and the first act of her womanhood was self-sacrifice.

Mr. Carrington and Mr. West parted with their companions at the garden-gate, sending their respective farewells to Mr. Vaughan, seeing that it was too late to return to the house. Constance passed unnoticed among the others, as the prayer-bell rung

on their entrance—passed to her accustomed place, glad and thankful that the refuge of prayer should come between her and her common life and speech. There was that in her face which made it seem older and harder. There was a sadder outlook from the eyes, a firmer compression of the mouth. It was altogether sterner, though the sternness, now and after, was always for herself. The look stamped there for the present would wear away, give place to her old look of vivacity and humour, and to all the play of a quick, womanly intellect and a warm heart; but it would come again, and yet again, and fix itself there at last. Constance was one of those women made to support others, though they themselves are walking with bleeding feet. One of those who pour the balm of consolation out of their own bruised and broken hearts.

But on that night there was no call upon her brave heart. She kissed her father more fondly perhaps, and was more gentle than her wont with her sisters—that was all. Indeed she was so subdued that Kate asked her playfully if she had been quarrelling with Mr. Carrington, and she answered with a smile, "No, we are as great friends as ever."

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### AT HOME.

ON Saturday afternoons Mary Potter was accustomed to take the domestic drudgery out of the feeble though willing hands of her daughter Sarah, and perform its hardest tasks with her own. She was thus engaged in brightening up the little parlour, when her husband returned with Esther, whom he introduced with very little ceremony. He even felt a kind of savage satisfaction in flinging his proud lady daughter—for he had no doubt she was proud—into a scene of domestic discomfort. She would be all the better able to realise at once the position of a poor man's child.

Mary Potter never looked untidy, whatever she might be doing; but she was heated and fatigued, and the shock of the unexpected meeting seemed about to prove too much for her. She rose from her rubbing, and staggered and would have fallen, but for the arm which Martin flung around her, while he led her to the little shabby sofa which filled one side of the room. The slight act of kindness on her husband's part and the look of joyful recognition on Esther's face revived her. Mother and daughter sat down side by side and were soon clasped in each other's arms. They were very like each other as they sat thus, allowing for the difference of years, only there was in Esther an infusion of will and power which brightened and vivified all her aspects.

When they looked up, Martin Potter had left the room. Perhaps he wished to allow them time to exhaust the first outburst of feeling, or else he desired

to leave to Esther the task of explaining how she had come there.

All this time Sarah had been standing in the background, blacklead-brush in hand, a forlorn, untidy figure. Nothing, not even her love for her mother, had power to keep Sarah tidy at her work, the lack of physical energy conquered her inclination. She felt painfully conscious of straggling hair, a very dirty frock, and fingers bedaubed with metallic black, as she stood watching Esther. But Mary noticed her girl's wistful look, and hastened to say, "This is Sarah, your sister Sarah, my greatest help and comfort."

It was this sympathetic tenderness which made Mary absolute in the hearts of her children, but which was expended as vainly as water on the rock upon Martin Potter. Tears filled Sarah's eyes as attention was thus directed to her. Esther went up to her, and though the girl would have held her back, kissed her on the forehead, without thinking how far her pretty pure dress might be soiled by the contact, a contingency to which her sister was quite alive. If a sudden pang not unlike jealousy had shot through the poor child's heart, it vanished at the sisterly caress. Pushing back her hair from her brow with her blackened fingers, she retired hastily to the back kitchen, content from that hour to be Esther's slave.

After a time the entrance of little Mary, who at once claimed acquaintance with Esther, brought back Mrs. Potter's mind to her domestic difficulties. The great difficulty which had to be met at present was that of housing a twelfth person in the space already insufficient for eleven. It must be accomplished in some way, however, as Mary knew. She had learned, though in a softened form, the history of Esther's appearance, and that her stay was likely to be more than a temporary one. She was greatly perplexed and saddened by her husband's conduct, so that after the first joy of meeting, she could not but grieve over Esther's coming. Indeed, a joy whose source is poisoned to us is often bitterer than an actual sorrow.

Leaving Esther and little Polly to entertain each other, she went to hold a consultation with Sarah as to what was to be done. She found the girl ready, nay eager, to give up anything to her new-found sister—to sleep in the coal-cellar, if necessary. Whenever there was any sacrifice of the kind to be made, it was generally Sarah who made it, on the principle of the willing horse being made to carry the burden. At last it was settled that she should give up her room, which she shared with little Mary, and sleep on the parlour sofa, by no means a bed of roses, for its springs were long since gone, and its stuffing unpleasantly hard and lumpy. This settled, they both set to work to make the tiny box of a place as neat as possible, and this being done, the stranger was at length shown to her room.



In their absence, Esther had had time to observe many things. She noticed a row of cane-bottomed benches, ranged round the wall in that half of the room called the back parlour; and on questioning Polly, found out that they were for "the pupils" who were coming back on Monday. She saw that the once resplendent pattern of the Kidderminster carpet was nearly effaced by the ceaseless tread of little feet, and even riddled with holes, though these had been carefully mended.

A worn and faded wax-cloth cover, gave a look of shabby respectability to a deal table with painted legs. Everything was shabby and worn, and yet carefully kept. It was the same in the tiny room into which she was ushered. Things that ought to have been white, were white no longer—never could be made white again by any process of washing, and yet they were clean. The mother, knowing to what her child had been accustomed, had given her of her best, robbing her own room of one or two articles of simple furniture, in order to make hers more comfortable. But nothing could redeem the sordidness of the place. It had an unwholesome air about it in the hot July afternoon. Through the open window she looked out on its surroundings; a sort of court, of triangular shape, lay beneath, surrounded by houses, except on the side occupied by a broken-down workshop. The floor of the enclosure was of black beaten earth; not a blade of grass, not even a weed would grow there, as Mr. Wiggett had said. The mere unloveliness was depressing; and the life that went on round that court seemed more depressing still. Esther had seen the poverty of the country; people who, as regards money and the means of living, were poorer even than these; but the hovel in the midst of the fields had nothing repulsive in its aspect, as had these dingy dwellings. Esther sickened as she looked at them, and blamed herself for sickening.

Tea was laid in the parlour when she came down. Sarah had called in Bob and Walter, and their mother had earnestly desired them to be on their best behaviour, which they readily promised, Master Bob beginning with the exclamation, "Oh, my eyes!" and enlarging those organs till they seemed about to suffer protrusion. After all, he behaved like a gentleman. Boy like, he was greatly influenced by beauty; and after a good long stare at Esther, he made up his mind that she was "a stunner"—a conclusion which he privately communicated to Walter in the back yard after tea. He even paid her extravagant attentions in the way of handing bread and butter, which he consumed himself to an alarming extent.

Then there was an interval of comparative quiet, in which the mother and daughter learned much of each other's lives. Esther questioned her mother eagerly about the school, and found that it was not

the poorer children of the neighbourhood whom Mary taught, but those of a much more exclusive community of small tradesmen, who were content to pay sixpence a week that their little girls might sit genteelly in a carpeted parlour, with bare arms and shoulders, and ringleted heads, no matter how little they learned. But Mary did her work well and conscientiously. Every seat in her small room was filled; and Esther found that her ambition was to get a larger room somewhere, and gather together a greater number of children. Schools like hers abounded in the neighbourhood; they were formed one year, or even quarter, and broken up the next; but, unlike her, the teachers had no qualifications whatever. Mary had been a teacher before certificates were common; but she had seen the value of the test as a guarantee of competency, and after coming to London, over and above the toils of her family and her little school, she had qualified herself for the examination, and had actually passed. "If I could only teach a little music," she said, "the parents would willingly pay me three times as much."

Thus the evening wore on. Martin Potter did not return; and Esther could see that her mother glanced up uneasily from her sewing whenever a heavy foot passed the parlour window. Mary had again to go away to look after domestic matters, and especially to prepare the little supper to which all the working members of the family gathered on Saturday night. In the interval Esther sat down and wrote to Mrs. West a letter, which Bob carried to the post in triumph. In the letter she still addressed her as "mamma," and its contents were very tender and affectionate. She had not lost or transferred in haste the love of years; but in her heart she already called Mary "mother;" and the deeper and more passionate feelings of her nature were stirred towards the working, sorrowing woman, as they had never been stirred before. But with delicate, instinctive shrinking from giving pain, she had scarcely mentioned her.

At length Emily and Agnes came in, both complaining of heat and headaches, and looking not a little unamiable. Mary, watching the impression which they made on Esther and she on them, saw, with the quickness which belongs to such tender natures, that it was less favourable than that produced by any of the others. The meal was a constrained one. The two lads, Martin and Willie, were unsociable, with the utter unsociableness of their kind. The twins would sit together and talk together in undertones. Esther did not know that it was a custom of theirs, and that, in particular moods, they would treat the whole family as outsiders, against whom they were in league for mutual defence and comfort. Mary, too, was ill at ease; her husband's presence might not have conduced to cheerfulness, but his prolonged absence was unusual and depressing. She had waited for him as long as

she could; but when once begun, she rather hastened the meal, in order that he might have his in greater comfort alone, if that was what he wanted. Esther was not sorry when it was over, and the little party had broken up.

Having gone up to her own room, she closed the door softly for fear of disturbing little Mary, already asleep. It was still very hot, and the child had tossed off her coverings, and lay quite across the bed, so that, without lifting her, there was no possibility of getting into it. Esther knew nothing about children; she did not know that she might have lifted her into her place with perfect impunity. Shading the candle with her hand, she stood looking on the wonderful beauty of a sleeping child, and Mary was a very lovely one. The half naked limbs were perfect in their fragile grace; the long lashes lay on the slightly flushed cheek; the parted lips had a look of appealing helplessness and innocence; the lightly heaving breast, in which dwelt the sacred mystery of life, made Esther experience an emotion of awe which she had never felt before. She did not dare to disturb the child; but she covered her over gently, for the window was still open; and putting out her light she sat down by the bed to think. There was light enough of the moon to enable her to watch little Mary's face, and the bed was so close to the window that she could look out into the court beneath.

There were sounds still both without and within the house. She heard the murmur of voices—her

brothers and sisters talking together in their own rooms. In such houses one hears every word almost. Without, people went and came at intervals. She could not help watching them. Within, they passed and re-passed the lighted windows, scantily curtained, and open for the heat. Voices reached her ear through these same open windows—voices of various tones, oftenest jarring ones, perhaps because these were loudest.

The moon was now shining full into the court; full on the black crooked chimney-stacks, out of which it made fantastic, unlovely shadows; full on the rugged roof of the broken-down workshop, and on the mean dwellings. The same moon was shining on "The Cedars," on the noble trees in their grand beauty and majestic calm, on the fair garden at Redhurst, and on the sweet and pleasant country all about. What a contrast! Then she thought of her friends—of Mrs. West, with her tender grace; of Constance, the one among her companions whom she really loved; of Harry—somehow his face and figure did not harmonise with sadness and with moonlight, and he flitted out of her thoughts. Then she thought of Milly and her happy love, and of the life that awaited her; and of Constance and her friend Benjamin Carrington, who would one day love her with more than a friendly love. Their future lay before them like a sunny garden. She had entered on a wilderness. She was only a woman, and she wept long and bitterly.

*(To be continued.)*

## THE REJECTORS OF OUR LORD.

BY THE REV. GEORGE ALEXANDER CHADWICK, M.A.



EVERYTHING about us changes. The mountain falling cometh to nought; rivers dry up; the coast-line is not what it once was. Yet this strange, impulsive, whimsical thing, human nature, is what it was from the beginning—Washington as Aristides, Napoleon as Sennacherib. Individuals come and go as waves cross the sea; the surface of humanity retains its character, even as the surface of the deep.

And the temptations of mankind, like man himself, are what they always were. Appetite, vanity, and ambition assailed Adam and Eve, as they will attack men upon the morning of the judgment-day. An apple or a crown may be the instrument, but the principle, which alone is dangerous, will be the same. If, then, we could review a number of past temptations, such as might be rightly judged, because their fires are burned out; if we could learn how they wrought upon the victim's mind; above all, if we could show, now that all is over, that the dupe who fell by them

grasped at a vain thing—that the wickedness bore fruit unto death, while the sweetness which was its bait could have been enjoyed better in the ways of righteousness, then we might be stronger and sterner to do battle against some like temptation, which will soon or late attack ourselves.

Now, the Bible is the great storehouse of example and warning to the Church, and as we turn its pages we see men in every age chasing phantoms and going down to the pit. But chiefly striking are the characters who influence the life of Christ himself. Men of learning, men of wealth, men of power, men of religious repute reject him, some at once and without a scruple, some after a deadly struggle. There was no beauty in him that they should desire him, therefore they shall see him hereafter in a devouring splendour as of flame. They set at nought and mocked him, therefore they shall hereafter vainly call upon rocks and mountains to hide them from his wrath. It would not be labour lost to take those his enemies who would not that he should reign over

them, to ask them one by one why they rejected the Redeemer, and to see what real weight was in their pleas. In the present paper it is our immediate object to consider

#### THE REJECTORS OF HIS INFANCY.

"When Herod heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

This verse contains the simplest specimen we could conceive, as well as the earliest, of revolt against Christ's authority. These "troubled" people knew nothing of the circumstances, nothing of the opinions, of the King of the Jews. His poverty, his provincialism, his humiliating and deep-cutting theology, had no share in their dissatisfaction. If one wished to learn whether a real desire for any Messiah whatever was in their hearts, he could not keep clear of all disturbing ideas more completely than the vague language of the Magi did. Nothing was made known, except that the long-expected King of the Jews was born, and yet that announcement was enough to fill Jerusalem with anxiety. It is plain, therefore, that the recoil was not from the son of Mary, but from the Christ as Christ.

Herod professed to be a devout Jew; he had rebuilt a great part of the temple in a style of wonderful magnificence, and he was a superstitious man. Jerusalem was a city of sacred associations; its aristocracy was a priesthood, its history was fast linked with Divine visitations of love and of vengeance; and those associations were all cancelled, that priesthood was a mockery, those interpositions were empty fables, except on the ground that a Christ was to come to his temple, and crown all past glories with a glory that excelleth.

Yet Herod and Jerusalem were troubled at the news of his approach. And let it be observed that neither one nor other would have been at all disturbed unless they believed the announcement. Incredulity cares not how terrible or how delightful be the tidings; disquietude is a proof of faith. Here, then, we have the amazing spectacle of a king and his people agitated and dismayed at the very tidings which they would have professed to long for most. The goal of all Jewish hopes is in sight, the aim of all Hebrew policy is attainable, but the nation shrinks back in fear. How is this?

Herod's backwardness is the most easily accounted for. He occupied the seat which Messiah claimed. To reach and keep the throne of Judea he had risked his own life and taken that of better men. He had plotted, and cringed, and broken faith, made his heart as a millstone, set his face as a flint, quenched the light of conscience, drowned the cries of natural affection. And now a band of strangers enter his capital with the announcement, not even that his dynasty is in

danger, but that a new king is already born, and, therefore, his own reign is legally at an end. To such a man the most deadly counsels often seem to be the safest, and he resolves to kill his rival without delay. The cruelty of the means are so far from being inconsistent with his character, that secular history does not seem to have thought the death of two or three dozen children worth mention among the horrors of his reign. He is the man of whom Augustus said, in allusion to his respect for the Jewish law and to the murder of three of his children, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."

But there is something odd enough in the folly of his conduct. If the child was fated to supplant him, the massacre was useless; if not, it was more useless still. He need not have moved unless he believed that the predicted Messiah was come, and, in fact, the question put to his advisers showed that such was his dread; he demanded of them where Christ should be born. But with so much faith in prophecy, he should have felt his opposition, to be as fruitless as if it were directed against the sunrise or the tides. It seems very astenishing that a man should set himself knowingly and bluntly against a Divine prediction. Yet Herod is far from being a lonely specimen of such folly, and there are thousands who imitate his wilfulness, without even the poor excuse of long success to blind them, and royal authority to make them stubborn.

He who said, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill," said also of his enemies, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Everyone, therefore, who accepts the Bible story, and yet hopes to escape while opposing Christ's authority in other breasts or in his own, is as directly as Herod setting himself against prophetic truth. How often has God pledged himself that ill-gotten gain shall not prosper—that the lying lip shall be silenced, and the righteous shall flourish as a palm-tree; yet there are countless thousands who believe the Bible to be true, without believing that these predictions are certain to be fulfilled. What a strange thing it is to see men, through fear of the wrath of God, abstaining from theft, from drunkenness, or from bloodshed (as Herod was powerfully influenced by the announcement of a Messiah), and yet neglecting the denunciations against envy, slander, greed, hardness of heart, neglect of Christ's brethren in the world. They, too, think that their own interests or passions may tread down a threat of Heaven. Like Eve, they hope not to die. Like Pharaoh, who said, "Intreat the Lord your God for me," they know whence good and evil are sent, yet they hear of woes to come, and will not bend their necks. The God of prophecy and of providence is pledged to

overthrow their schemes; and they know it, and persevere as stubbornly as did Herod the king.

Then there was the priestly party. When the chief priests and scribes were gathered together, they could point to the very spot where Christ was to come. We infer that they had studied the question; were skilled in prophetic lore, and in the more unsubstantial fabric which conjecture had reared upon it; could perhaps discourse, impressively and eloquently, about the hope of Israel and the glory of the latter days. These were naturally among the topics with which learning and acumen sported, and by which the homage of admiring disciples was attracted. A religious reputation could be won by skill and unction in handling such a theme. But it is one thing to talk well of the joy of Christ's appearing (whether the first time or the second), and quite another thing to be really joyful when he does appear. So many vested interests, which are not interfered with by ever so much mere speaking, begin to crumble when theories turn themselves into facts. So much profession, which has dazzled and melted the hearers, has, on a sudden, to be justified by deeds. So many dark corners in the heart, lurking-places of sensuality, or pride, or falsehood, which have not been exposed to the common eye, begin to fear the scrutiny of the Judge. Before we blame the priests of Judea for being troubled, let us consider the circumstances. They had woven a vast web, of fine but most fragile materials around the law of Moses, and the foot of Messiah might possibly trample the whole fabric down. They enjoyed an exalted position as expounders of the law, and it was at least conceivable that Messiah might quash their judgments, and drive them from Moses' seat as usurpers. They administered a system which was confessed to be preparatory and introductory, but which suited them very well to administer; and the coming of Messiah would alter that system, and render their future uncertain, if not unsatisfactory.

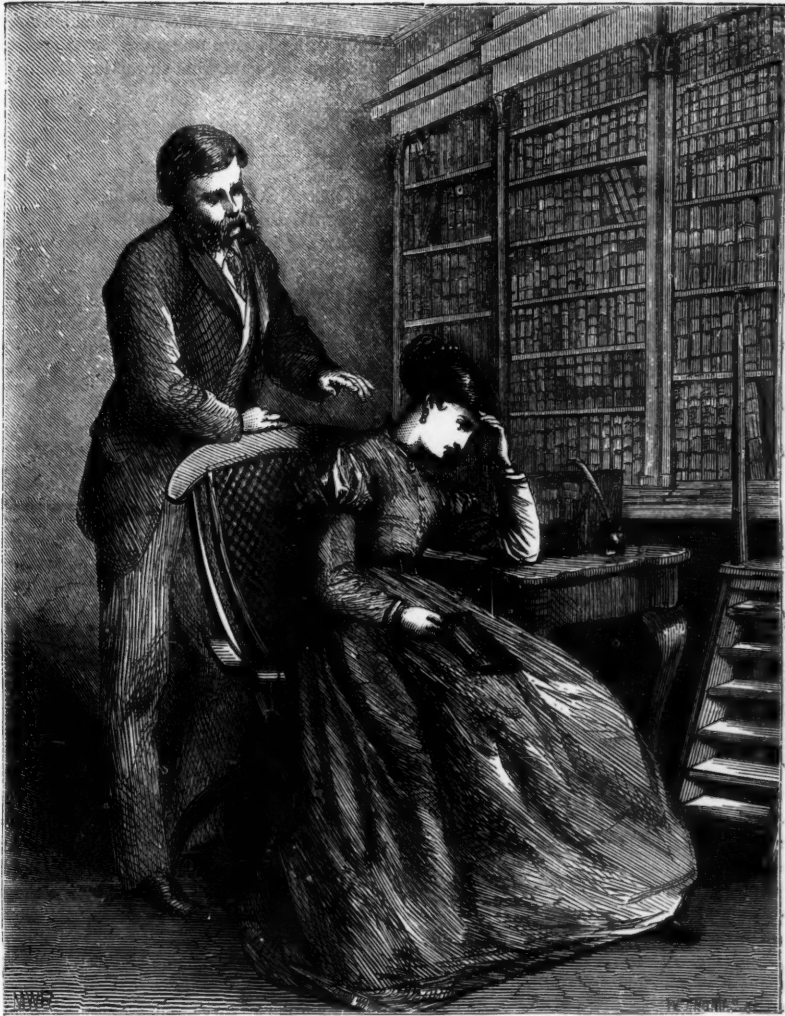
Perhaps there are some in our own day who could sympathise with their dilemma. If any man dares to push his own speculations or theories into the place of ascertained facts, he will be likely to shrink back when the touchstone is suddenly presented. Churchmen and Dissenters, who are these in the first place, and Christians only in the second, might perhaps recoil from the approach of One who will probably do away with national churches and dissent together, by absorbing both in something higher which we know not yet. People who look to their own interests as the chief concern—aristocrats, who hate democracy, only because it would pull them down, and demagogues, who love it only because it would build them up—are always likely to regard a new movement with distrust, thinking little of

mankind, and a great deal of a certain unit in the multitude. The slave-holders who fought Wilberforce and Buxton all their lives were not unlike these old Jews; and the clergymen who, in another country, argued from "cursed be Canaan" to the whipping of blacks, would have felt in their place exactly as they did. It is one of the dangers of a sacred profession, to-day, as long ago, to look at religion from the professional point of view, and to deprecate learning because it weakens authority, and science because it clashes with tradition.

Something similar was probably the feeling of the people at large. They knew that Messiah's reign would be one of peace, plenty, and prosperity; but they also knew or believed that tremendous convulsions and calamities would come first. Expecting a temporal sovereign, they may have recoiled from the task of fighting, even with such a Leader, the solid squadrons of the victors of the world. Was the issue worth the cost? To be once more independent and illustrious, under the wing of a protecting God, sounded well: but people of a middle age, people who had got a little property together, people who were at ease in Zion, and loved their own comfort more than the true peace of Jerusalem, would be very apt to fear the impending change, as more likely to compromise than serve themselves. Besides, they could not tell how many would survive when the spoils came to be divided; toil and wounds, and the disruption of old associations, were all that each faint-hearted citizen saw plainly in front of him. Once more, as of old, fleshpots were better, even with bondage to the foreigner, than freedom and a life of pilgrimage. Once more, being armed and carrying bows, they turned back in the day of battle. Once more, in their professions of loving expectation, they were flattering with their lips while their hearts were far from Him.

So it is with every one who shrinks from a high standard of Christian excellence, because it will be likely to interfere with some worldly scheme, keeping his conscience blunted lest it should cry out against his trade, or perversely arguing down some new and startling view of truth, not because it is false, but because it is sweeping. Teetotalism may, in each individual opinion, be right or wrong, but the temper of those old citizens is exactly that which declaims against it merely because wine is pleasant, or because spirits sustain the Exchequer. In the American war, some of us were willing to have attacked the North, in order to get cotton from the South; in which there was certainly an infusion of the same spirit that preferred a prosperous life to the greatest theoretical blessing. In short, wherever we find a man ready to cling to what is gainful or pleasant, even at the cost of what is holy and





"She neither moved nor spoke when he entered."—p. 125.

good; to cry down generosity and chivalry as "fine language," and sacrifice the future for the present, and sell a birthright for a mess of pottage, there is the same baneful tendency at work which troubled Jerusalem when the King of the Jews was born.

Herod, after all, died in two or three months; and the dynasty for which he strove so hard was soon removed by his allies of Rome. The priestly order speedily crumbled into dust. The city sank down, after enduring more frightful woes than any

fortress in the world. Christ would not have interfered with Herod's kingdom, for his own was not of this world. He would have made that poor and shadowy priesthood the vestibule of a rich and enduring reality—a royal priesthood. He would have gathered the people together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings—safe though the kite be poised in the skies above. So vain a thing is it to fear losses from serving Him, or to hope for gain from thwarting Him.

#### WAITING FOR THE TIDE.

**L**IT the soft lights o'er the mountain,  
Joyous mid the shades they glide;  
But the boat below lies stranded,  
Waiting for the tide!

White wings flit across the sunburst  
Out beyond the wild Dunree,  
Where the ocean-tides pulse strongly  
From their outer sea.

Through the dark cave flies the sea-bird,  
Weak things o'er the shallows ride;  
But the great ship rocks at anchor,  
Waiting for the tide!

Lonely, lonely in the twilight,  
With a drooping sail beside,  
(Yet not furl'd!) the heart lies stranded,  
Waiting for the tide!

Vain the keel that seeks the ocean,  
Vain the strong sail, all unfurl'd.  
Soul and ship need truer breathings  
Than from this low world.

But the Holy Spirit cometh,  
Never for our need too late.  
Wait, oh, heart, the tide's returning,  
Trust, as well as wait!

A. BOND.

#### A DANGEROUS IMPRESSION.

BY SIDNEY DARYL.

**T**ELL you what it is, Charlie, old boy; you'll find the Priory about the best quarters you ever put your head inside. Lester himself is a regular trump; and as for his daughter, she's the nicest girl in the world."

The above observation was addressed to one Charles Blunt, by his *fidus Achates*, Cecil Travers, as, after an hour and a half's journey, these two worthies found themselves bowling along in the cosiest of broughams from the Clavering station towards Ditchingham Priory, whither they were bound on a visit to a certain Colonel Lester, an old Indian officer, who—as a remarkable exception to the general rule—had, while filling his money-bags in the East, managed to preserve his liver. Charles Blunt knew but little of him—indeed, they had only met on one occasion at dinner at Cecil's club, the Thespian, when they sat next to one another, and the colonel was, though exceedingly loquacious, very amusing in his anecdotes of his shooting and hunting experiences in the jungles of Bengal. The silence and attention with which Master Charles listened to the fine old boy's stories, quite won his heart, and when he bade

him good night, he supplemented the commonplace by a warm pressure of the hand, and a cordial invitation "to run down with Cecil for a few days, and see what his little box in the country was like."

In due course Charlie received a letter from the colonel, warmly reiterating his invitation in writing, and not only naming the day, but specifying the train by which he and Cecil were to travel. Clients were not sufficiently numerous to excite any apprehension in Charlie's breast that his prospects would be injured by a short absence from the Temple, and so he did not hesitate to scribble off a reply, saying "he was delighted to accept, and would come as arranged." Hence the origin of our finding him in the colonel's brougham, and as it rolls briskly along behind the fast-trotting roan mare, just let me say a word about its two occupants.

Charlie Blunt, as chief performer in this veracious history, claims to be noticed first. I am not about to present a photograph of his features, after the approved fashion; suffice it that he was a gentlemanly, good-looking young fellow, who always dressed well, and was to be met in some of the best West-end drawing-rooms. In respect of

means, he had just enough to admit of his being idle, but not sufficient to admit of extravagance. His chambers in Garden Court were comfortably furnished, his costume *sans reproche*, his club one of the best in town—in fact, for a bachelor, he was in very satisfactory condition. In temperament he was peculiar; that is to say, he possessed one very awkward faculty, which had in more than a single instance placed him in a very equivocal position. His heart was too susceptible; he was perpetually falling head over ears in love. It would, however, require three ample volumes at least to individualise Charlie Blunt's affairs of the heart; suffice it, at the time we make his acquaintance, he was as impressionable as ever. Now, if any one ought to have grown steady it was he, and for the best of reasons—namely, that he had plighted his word to the best and dearest little woman in the world, who well nigh forgot the second Commandment, and almost worshipped him. It was at a croquet party that he came, and saw, and conquered Alice Vernon's heart, and in his turn was taken captive by a pair of soft grey eyes and a gentle expression, that had carried sunshine and peace into more than one humble cottage in her father's parish.

Mr. Vernon, the rector of High Stanton, in Devonshire, was a widower, with a comfortable living and an only child, the before-mentioned Alice, who was the light of his very heart. Nothing was too good for her. Every wish of hers had only to be made known to him to be instantly gratified, and when, on a certain fine summer morning, Charlie Blunt appeared in his study and asked his permission to an engagement between him and Alice—though the mere thought of losing her distressed him terribly, it was enough that she had previously informed him that it would be for her happiness, and with a reservation that the wedding should not take place for six months—he accorded his assent. For the remaining ten days during which he was staying in High Stanton, Charlie was in a state of ecstasy, and spent the whole of his time at the parsonage in Alice's society.

He made up his mind to become quite a different character, and when he left High Stanton, and returned to London, carrying with him a pretty locket, with a pretty face inside it, he had fully made up his mind to resist all invitations to dinners, dances, and evening parties. He preserved his resolution intact for just one week. At the end of that time, after a brief but vigorous argument, he convinced himself that he was committing an egregious blunder in thus cutting himself off from his friends, and that for purely business reasons it was of the highest importance that he should keep well in with his numerous and influential acquaintance. This debate with self he duly reported

in his next letter to Alice, and she, by the following post, sent a reply expressing a full belief in the wisdom of his conclusions, and overflowing in the fulness of her loving and confiding heart. So the butterfly went back into the sunshine, and fluttered his wings as of yore. And Alice waited in her own quiet home patiently, devotedly, and undisturbed by doubts or fears, though her lover's letters grew fewer and shorter, and their tone colder and colder.

Such was the state of affairs when Charlie Blunt went to pay his visit to Colonel Lester, to which we must now more particularly return, remarking, by the way, that Cecil Travers was a clerk in Her Majesty's Waste-paper Office, with a taste for magazine writing, and an extensive acquaintance among literary men.

Charlie had not been within the four walls of Ditchingham Priory for five minutes before he felt thoroughly at home, and it was in an exceedingly equable frame of mind that, having arranged his hair and settled his necktie to his satisfaction, he made his way down to the drawing-room.

"Let me introduce you to my daughter," said Colonel Lester, taking him by the arm as he entered, and leading him up to a tall, handsome girl, who was turning over the pages of a *carte-de-visite* album for the edification of an elderly beauty in canary-coloured silk and a horticultural wreath. The usual formalities having been duly observed, Charlie was deputed to take Ethel Lester into dinner, a duty which he was only too delighted to find imposed upon him, for already he was deeply impressed by the beauty and grace of his host's daughter, while her quietness and self-possession in a very few moments made him feel as if they were old friends. Ethel Lester was well worthy admiration. She was a true woman in the fullest sense of the term, and all who came in contact with her were irresistibly impressed by the unselfishness and nobility of her nature.

Charlie made himself excessively agreeable during dinner, and quite monopolised Ethel's conversation. I am sorry to say that that treacherous heart of his was at its old pranks, and the more he talked to Ethel, and the oftener he looked into her face, the less did he think of her who should have been foremost in his thoughts. As for Ethel, she was quite unaware of his position; she only knew that he was a very good-looking, agreeable young fellow, who had engaged her interest, and who, she was very glad to think, was to remain some days more at the Priory. She had already confided to him her intention of getting up some charades, and had enlisted him as the manager; in fact, by the time the ladies rose to leave the dining-room, Charlie Blunt and Ethel Lester were on the best possible terms with one another.

"I say, Charlie," observed Cecil Travers, moving up the table to the chair next to his friend, "you've

been going it pretty considerably for an engaged man. I wonder what a certain young lady in Devonshire would say to your proceedings."

"Perfectly harmless, I assure you," replied the susceptible one. "What a bore it is that a fellow can't be commonly polite to a girl, without immediately exciting the suspicions of his anxious friends."

When Ethel Lester found herself alone in her room that night, it required no very severe cross-examination of self for her to come to the conclusion that Charlie Blunt had made an impression on something more than her interest, and that a further acquaintance with him could, as far as she was concerned, tend to only one result. She could scarcely understand her own feelings; thoughts new and strange disturbed her, and long after the inmates of the Priory were hushed in repose, she sat gazing into the fire, thinking and thinking, till the life in the glowing embers died out and the light of the lamp grew dim.

As swiftly as the time passed to Charlie, so speedily must this history hurry on to the morning of the day preceeding that on which the charades were fixed to take place. Everybody within an accessible distance had been invited; and as Colonel Lester was very popular in the neighbourhood, there was every prospect of a large gathering.

Charlie was invaluable, so Ethel said, and no one was inclined to contradict her. Whether there was any absolute necessity for it or not, it is impossible to say, but he and Ethel were continually in consultation. In fact, they saw a great deal more of one another than was desirable, if the gentleman's position and the young lady's future peace of mind were to be considered. For Charlie's conduct no defence can be offered, and on the principle of the old proverb, "*Qui s'excuse s'accuse*," it is probably better that nothing whatever should be said in his behalf.

But to return to the particular morning of which mention has already been made. After breakfast, Charlie strolled out into the Priory shrubbery. As he paced up and down the broad walk, certain reflections occurred to him that were far from complimentary to him as a man of honour. He could not prevent his thoughts wandering away to a loving, patient, little woman, who was waiting and hoping so trustfully for the time to arrive when he should come to her to fulfil his promise and claim her for his wife. And then, as he thought of her implicit confidence in his faith and truth, his cheek flushed with shame, and he clenched his fists in an agony of rage with himself. Had there been a particle of resolution in Charlie Blunt's character, the feelings of that moment would have made a different man of him for the remainder of his days. But he was miserably

weak, and there was no one near to lend him strength. He would take his departure from the Priory that instant, he said to himself; but he still continued walking backwards and forwards amongst the laurels and rhododendrons. He would disclose everything to Ethel Lester; but when he came upon her suddenly at the end of the path, carrying a basket of camellias she had just picked in one of the hothouses, he held his peace and went on with her toward the house. Suddenly a terrible impulse possessed him. He but faintly resisted it, and in a second more he whispered to Ethel passionate words of love and entreaty, while happy tears moistened her drooping lashes and her eyes spoke eloquently what her heart would say. And then she ran into the house and up to her own room, and reflected on her new-found happiness.

As for Charlie, when the paroxysm of impulse was passed, the relapse that followed was fearful to endure. He felt that he had disgraced his manhood, and that he could step neither backwards nor forwards without dishonour. On one thing he was determined: Alice Vernon must know all at once, and without delay. Her he could deceive no longer. He rushed into the house and made his way to the library, where he flung himself into a chair at the writing-table. Presently he opened the blotting-book before him, which to all appearance had never before been used, and taking a sheet of paper, filled a pen with ink, and set about telling the woman he had sworn to make his wife, how that could never be now. But it was long before he could begin the shameful task, and when he did commence, his hand shook in its work, as if unwilling to lend itself to anything so disgraceful. The bell was ringing for luncheon as he brought the story of his faithlessness to a conclusion, and hastily folding up the sheet upon which it was told, he put it into an envelope and directed it, dropping it into the letter-bag as he passed through the hall.

It was noticed by many of the inmates of the Priory that evening, that Ethel Lester seemed strangely saddened in manner. She conversed less than usual, and soon after dinner pleaded indisposition, and retired to her own apartment. To Charlie she had scarcely spoken a word; but when he rose and opened the door for her to go out, she gave him such a sad, tearful glance, and as he closed it, he heard a sound proceeding from the direction she had taken, much like a sob.

The following morning, Ethel was to all appearances completely restored to health and spirits. As for Charlie, he was altogether in a miserable condition; he felt, and naturally enough, utterly ashamed and disgusted with himself, and his embarrassment was far from being relieved by the coldness with which Ethel treated him, and the



incomprehensible manner in which she avoided being left for an instant alone with him. After lunch he saw her drive away in her pony phaeton, and heard her remark at starting that she was going to Clavering station, to meet a friend she expected by the up-train; but she did not address a single word to him, nor turn her head once to look back as she drove down the Chase. What could have wrought this sudden change in her?

On that afternoon Charlie wandered in solitary wretchedness about the village; and when he got back to the Priory in the evening, he was met in the hall by Ethel's maid, who informed him "that her mistress would be glad for him to step into the library and speak to her, as she wanted to see him on a matter of importance." To hear was but to obey, and in a moment more he stood in Ethel's presence. There was no light in the room but that of the fire, which was burning brightly enough for him to see that she was sitting in an arm-chair by the writing-table, shading her eyes with her hand. She neither moved nor spoke when he entered; and until he crossed to her side and, touching her on the shoulder, whispered "Ethel," did she seem aware of his presence. Then her hand dropped, and she looked up at him.

"You must call me Ethel no more," she said, so quietly, yet firmly: "everything between us is passed now, and must be forgotten."

"Passed! forgotten!" exclaimed Charles; "what does this mean?"

"It means that I know all," she answered, in the same calm, gentle tone, and then taking Charlie's hand in hers, she continued, "Yes, all! I am not going to blame you for hiding the truth from me, I only thank God that I learnt it in time. Listen to me as you would to a loving sister. You, the creature of a passing fancy, would have recklessly flung away the heart of the trusting woman to whom you were engaged, to gratify the impulse of a momentary caprice. And you would have made me a partner with you in doing this cruel wrong. Nay, hear me," she added, as Charlie murmured something. "A fortunate accident has spared you lifelong self-reproach, and me from innocently destroying the happiness of one who is well worthy all the love and devotion you can bestow on her. She is here in this house, knowing nothing, believing nothing, but in your faith and truth. Take this packet, its contents will inform you as to how I became an involuntary possessor of your secret; and now leave me, and prepare yourself to meet your betrothed wife. Go," she continued, as Charlie remained motionless at her side, gazing in the fire-light at the small bundle of papers she had thrust into his hand, "and may you and she always feel that no one more sincerely prays for your happiness than Ethel Lester."

He uttered no word in answer, only bent down and kissed her hand, and then departed to his own room. And she, when the door had closed upon him, sank back in her chair, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

When Charlie examined the packet Ethel had given him, he found that it consisted of two sheets of blotting-paper, and the letter he had written on the preceding day to Alice folded up in them, with the seal intact and precisely in the same condition as when he had put it into the post-bag in the hall of the Priory. A second glance at the sheets of blotting-paper explained all: upon one of them was a clear and perfectly readable impression of the cruel epistle that had cost him so much labour to compile; and on the other, a reproduction of the address upon the envelope. Well was it that they had fallen into the hands of a true woman, who forgot self, and saved him from taking a step that he would have regretted till his dying day. The lesson was a severe one; but Charlie Blunt, as he cast the evidence of his treachery into the fire, felt that he had profited by it.

It was by the merest chance that Ethel had happened to go into the library to write a letter directly after Charlie had left it, and the moment she sat down at the table, the first thing that met her eye was the blotting-book lying open before her, and imprinted upon it his confession, in bold and unmistakable characters. What need to say more than that she read it through to the end? by which time her mind was made up as to two things: first, that the letter itself should not go; and, secondly, that she would at once write to Alice Vernon, and invite her to come the following day to the Priory on a visit? They had never met, but this difficulty was to be surmounted by an excuse for want of formality, that it would make Charlie much happier for his intended wife to be present at the charades; "and both Colonel Lester and she hoped that Miss Vernon would waive ceremony, and, by accepting the invitation, enable them to gratify Mr. Blunt." And thus this good Samaritan, almost crushed by her own disappointment, and with an aching heart, planned her charitable plot, nor hesitated to perform her share in it at once. As for Alice, she responded to the invitation in the spirit in which it was given; and High Stanton being on the same line of railway as Clavering, and only about two hours' journey, she had ample time to pack up her things, and leave by the middle day train mentioned by Ethel in her letter.

Within six months after Charles Blunt's visit to the Priory, he and Alice Vernon were married. I hear some one say, "What a pity for so nice a girl to be thrown away on such a good-for-nothing, changeable fellow!" There, my friend, you are wrong; he is a very different person now to what

he was when you knew him, and is as firm and resolute of purpose as the best of us.

What of Ethel Lester? I am happy to say that, like a sensible girl, she did nothing so foolish as to break her heart, or to retire into melancholy solitude for the remainder of her days and die a miserable old maid. On the contrary,

it is just whispered that Cecil Travers is very often down at the Priory, and that he and Ethel appear to enjoy one another's society. *Tant mieux*; for, absurd though it may be, there is a popular prejudice in favour of everybody marrying everybody else, and living happily ever afterwards.

## THE GOLDEN GATE.

### PART II.

**D**ARK as night. Nellie clung to her guide as closely as she could, and cried out, "Oh, dear! I can't see. Why is it so dark all at once?"

"Why, my dear," answered Idleness, "it is not so dark as you fancy. Your eyes have been too much accustomed to the white glare of that horrid road—spoilt, I may say."

"Still, it is rather dark," submitted Nellie, at the same time straining her eyes, and longing to be convinced by her companion that all was right.

"Yes, *rather*," admitted the gauzy maiden; "but in a moment you will have another light, and a better. Don't you begin to detect a beautiful rosy glow?"

"Yes, there it is," exclaimed Nellie, joyfully.

"Very well," continued Idleness; "see how it gradually expands into a lovely yellow light."

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Nellie, and she tried to clap her hands; but a strange feeling of lassitude came over her, and they dropped listlessly into their former position. She had let fall the staff with which she had commenced her travels, near the spot where she had turned aside with Idleness; neither did she need it now, for they were tripping down a rapid descent. Each step gave an additional impetus to the next, so that she was soon careering down-hill with a rapidity that surprised herself and shortened her breath not a little. Idleness, however, had used those fairy wings of hers, and scuttled down the path she knew so well, with very little trouble.

They had now arrived within the region over which the yellow light spread itself; and there Nellie beheld the gayest scenes she ever witnessed. She saw before her a soft green sward, which stretched away as far as her eye could see; and on this dainty ground a thousand groups were sporting and enjoying themselves to the utmost extent; while here and there a solitary individual lay calmly basking in the yellow light.

"This is the fair country I told you of, my child," said the gauzy being, with an air of great dignity. "I am the queen of this country, and you are now my little friend and subject."

As she spoke, troops of the revellers came bounding towards her, and bent the knee to her, singing, "Long live our pretty Queen Idleness! All honour to our little fairy queen!"

Queen Idleness acknowledged the salutations of

her subjects with a great many nods of her wreath-crowned head, and said, "See here! I have brought you this little girl Nellie for a playmate. She has full liberty to sport with the gayest among you."

The news was received with a shout of welcome, and Nellie herself was borne away to share in any game she pleased of all those which were practised in that region of Idleness, and they were many, I can assure you.

Nellie was not long in recognising several familiar faces, the faces of these she had been used to look upon with envy. Here was Bell Gadwell, in particular, who was always dancing and running about in the lanes near Nellie's summer-home without any one to keep her in check or to spoil her sport. Here she was, bounding about more joyously and freely (if possible) than at home.

Bell quickly caught sight of Nellie, and running up to her, exclaimed, "That's right, Nellie; I'm glad you've come. It is such jolly fun! I scarcely expected to see you here though, you always seemed such a quiet creature, and so very busy, too, most part of the day. And now you have come we'll have a fresh game of 'Oranges and Lemons.' Or would you rather have 'Ticky-ticky Touchwood?'"

"Oh," said Nellie, "we'll have 'Oranges and Lemons' first, and the other afterwards." So at it they went, until Nellie was so exhausted that she wanted a rest. So she left the games, and went towards Queen Idleness, who beckoned to her smilingly.

"Come to me awhile, my dear," said the gauzy monarch, "and tell me, how do you like your new country?"

"It's quite delightful," said Nellie: "and you are a darling queen!"

"That is what all my little subjects say," replied Idleness, and I *must* say that they have a happy time of it, so long as they keep the laws of the country they have chosen."

"What laws are they?" asked little Nellie, wonderingly.

"The laws of my kingdom," answered Idleness, "are exceedingly simple and easy. They amount to this: first, you may play, eat, drink, or sleep as long as you like, and whenever you like; and secondly, no work of any kind is allowed on any pretext whatever."

"You dear, good queen!" exclaimed Nellie. "I

should not think there was any fear of those laws being broken. Why, it is always holiday-time."

"Exactly so," said the smiling queen. "And now that you have rested a little you may go back to play."

At that moment Nellie heard the sound of quarrelling not far off, and she hastened to see what was the matter. Two rough-looking boys were talking loudly, and gesticulating violently, and a crowd of children had gathered round, and were evidently enjoying the sport. Cries of "It's fair," and "No, it isn't," were mingled with the altercation of the two boys, and the noise quite jarred upon Nellie's ears. Peering within the ring that had been formed round them, she saw on the ground the cause of their dispute—a top which had been split in half by the peg of another. By-and-by the owner of the broken top began to enforce his argument with blows, and soon, to the delight of the crowd, there took place what the more vulgar of them called "a regular set-to." But the sight was too repulsive for Nellie's eyes, and she thought, "Surely our kind-hearted queen would not permit this if she knew it. I will go and tell her all about it, and she will make them shake hands and be friends again."

So she ran as fast as she could to the place where Idleness enthroned herself, crying, "Oh, please—"

She stopped short, for she saw that the queen had fallen asleep, with a picture-book on her knees. In Nellie's eyes how pretty she looked! Her rosy lips were just parted with a half-smile, her head had fallen slightly on one side, and her light golden hair streamed down in shining ringlets over her shoulders, the wreath that bound it being as bright and crisp-looking as ever. What a pity to wake her! But then, there were the boys still fighting away as if for their lives, so it must be done.

"Wake up, Idleness, dear," said Nellie, timidly, shaking her hand; the only effect of this being to shake away the smile, and to put a sleepy frown into its place.

"Please wake up, dear queen," said Nellie, "only for a few minutes."

"Dear me! what does the child want?" exclaimed Idleness, starting up suddenly, and frowning and yawning very violently.

"I've only come to tell you that two naughty boys are fighting out yonder," explained Nellie.

"Well, what is that to me?" snapped the awakened monarch, still frowning and yawning; "what is it to me, or to you either? Let them alone, and let me go to sleep."

Nellie felt some surprise and disappointment. She thought, however, that she would try once more.

"I am sorry I awoke you, dear Idleness; but they are hurting one another so; and I'm sure if you only spoke to them they would be afraid to fight any more."

"Nothing of the kind, child," answered Idleness; "they know they are not breaking any of my laws, and I don't mean to disturb either myself or them."

And now, let me go to sleep, or I shall be tempted to be very angry with you."

So saying, the capricious little beauty turned herself again to one side and fell asleep as before, with the half-smile on her rosy lips, and the golden hair streaming down upon her shoulders.

In the meantime the battle had been summarily concluded, the vanquished boy was lying by himself on the spot where he had been thrown, and the victor was walking off with great dignity, surrounded by the crowd, who cheered him at the top of their voices, and vociferated his praises to one another in a most vehement manner. Most of them had tired of the milder sports, and had been only too glad of the diversion created by the quarrel. At all which Nellie sighed, and could not help feeling some misgivings as to the lot she had chosen; the thought now occurred to her that she might possibly tire of this endless sport and pastime; but she was determined not to admit such an idea, so she tried to banish it by having another game.

"Bell," said she, going up to that young lady, who was lolling listlessly on the sward, and biting the petals off any unhappy buttercup that came within her reach, "don't you think we could get up another game?"

"Oh, bother games!" said Bell; "I'm thoroughly sick of them, and as tired as I can be, and I don't know what on earth to do with myself. I wish there was another fight; I declare I do."

"Oh, Bell, for shame!" cried Nellie.

"It's all very well for you to say 'for shame,' but when you have been in this place as long as I have, you'll be glad of anything in the way of a change. I sometimes wish I could leave it, and very often I feel quite determined to do so; but then I alter my mind again, especially if something happens out of the common. And then it's such a bore to have to think about anything long together."

This little speech did not tend to reassure Nellie; she began to feel weary and dispirited, and the listlessness which from the first had been creeping over her, now seemed to overpower her, and to take away from her all desire for amusement. So she contented herself (if such a word can be applied to her frame of mind) with wandering about the sward, and looking at the groups. Everything seemed changed to her now; she did not see one happy face: moroseness and discontent seemed to rest on every brow. By-and-by she came upon a large cage, barred in front with thick iron. Over this she saw the word "Prison" printed in large square letters, that seemed to scowl upon her. In this prison were several beds and chairs, and in one of the bath-chairs she recognised an old acquaintance, whom, when going out one afternoon for a walk, she had pointed out to her mamma, saying, "That little girl is always being wheeled about; ought she not to be happy?" to which, her mamma had answered that the little

girl had lost the use of her limbs, and was not able to do anything. Nellie now saw that the child was weeping, and asked her what was the matter.

"Because I cannot get out of this dreadful place," sobbed the little girl.

"And did Idleness put you here?"

"Yes; and my limbs are bound with her shackles. Oh, if I were only as free as you are, I would leave this hateful place in a moment."

"And where would you go?"

"I would try and find my way to the path which leads to the Golden Gate. I would reach it, even if I had to crawl on my hands and knees!"

"But the road is very rough," suggested Nellie, feeling a little ashamed of her own conduct in having willingly left it.

"Oh, dear, no! If you have only the perseverance to travel on, it gets smoother and smoother. When I was on that road, I was as happy as the day is long; but I was suddenly forced from the path, and was in darkness a long time, till I woke up, and found myself a prisoner in this horrible place. And all I can now do is to warn everybody who comes near me to run away from the country of Idleness as quickly as they can, unless they want to be made miserable for ever! If you will take my advice, you will not lose another moment, but flee back at once to that right path."

"But what if Idleness sees me, and tries to detain me?" replied Nellie.

"You must seize some moment when she is dozing. She is frequently asleep, and so are most of those who dwell here, for the air is very drowsy, and makes one's eyes heavy."

Nellie sighed. "One cannot help liking Idleness, she is so pretty, and smiles so sweetly. And how beautifully that wreath becomes her! The flowers never seem to fade."

"There is a very good reason," answered the prisoner, "why they should not. They are all artificial, and her kind ways and speeches are equally false. While pretending to be our dearest friend, she is our greatest enemy. Ah! if I could only fly with you! Yet I ought not to cry like this."

"But I am afraid I shall not be able to find the way back," said Nellie, despondingly.

"Oh, never fear!" answered the little prisoner, now becoming more cheerful at the thought of perhaps being able to do some good in that deceitfully gay region. "Never fear, dear! only have a little courage, and you will get back quickly enough."

"I will go! I will!" cried Nellie, bursting into tears. "I have been wicked to run away from it. And you—will you be here always?"

"Oh, no! I shall not be here always. By-and-by one of those shining beings, who stand at the Golden Gate, will come and carry me there, and I shall not be shackled any more. And I shall be happy in the land beyond the gate, for everybody and everything

there is pure, and peaceful, and joyful. And if you get back to the right path, and go on steadily till you reach the Golden Gate, I shall most likely be there ready to meet you, and won't that be delightful?"

Then the children said good-bye, and Nellie hastened past the throne of Idleness, who was, happily for our little heroine, still fast asleep. On and on went the child, very fearful at first, but gaining courage as she went. It was up-hill work though, and what had been smooth in the descent, was rough enough in the ascent; then, too, the old darkness came on, and Nellie was sore dismayed. For a long time she stumbled and clambered, and often was so disheartened as to feel inclined to go back to the yellow light. At length, however, there was a sudden gleam; a few steps more, and the darkness was gone. The light was once more shining upon her gladdened eyes, and there, in the old true path, stood Duty with arms outstretched to welcome the little wanderer.

"Oh, dear Duty!" cried Nellie, sobbing aloud with joy, "I am so glad to be with you again, and I will do the arithmetic now."

But Duty kissed her over and over again, and hugged her so closely! And Nelly was so overcome with joy that she—awoke. Awoke—to find herself in her mother's arms, and the new poetry-book ignominiously sprawling on the floor beside her little bed.

"Bless me! what was the dear child saying in her sleep about duty and the arithmetic?" her mamma was asking herself, as Nellie rubbed her eyes in bewilderment, and gradually realised that she had been dreaming.

"Oh, mamma, I have had such a wonderful dream, all about the Golden Gate in my book. Shall I tell you all about it?"

"Yes, my child, I should like to hear it."

So Nelly told it all, while it was still fresh upon her mind; and when she had finished, her mamma said, "It is really a wonderful dream; it is a dream, too, which came to you at exactly the right time. I am sure you will think over it carefully, and try to impress it in your memory; and it will show you, more forcibly than could any lesson of mine, my child, how wretched any one must eventually become who forsakes the path of duty. And now you must come down-stairs to tea, my dear. But, what do you think? I have a surprise for you."

"What is it, mamma, dear?"

"A little girl's company to tea. Her name is Alice Day; and she is none other than the poor little invalid whom you—"

"The very same? Oh, how strange—how charming!" cried Nellie, clapping her hands in ecstasy at the idea of the poor little prisoner being a real acquaintance.

"The very same, Nellie, dear. So, when you have washed your face and hands, we will go down to tea."